

THE CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

According to a recent and unauthoritative estimate, more than 2 million visitors came to England in 1969. How many of these were Americans our demographers and customs officials have not yet revealed, but it is certain that the charm of Britain and the civility of its inhabitants combine to strengthen the bonds of history and to draw our compatriots across the ocean in their thousands and their tens of thousands. Most of these travelers go to London and some go to London only. The metropolis has attractions for all.

After one's first or second visit to the classic shrines, after the layman has been to Trafalgar Square, the Bank of England, or Soho, and the physician has been to Guy's Hospital, the charm of planned travel is gradually replaced by the charm of planless wandering.

If you wander in the district of Chelsea and are accompanied by your wife, it is best to bear southward toward the Thames, since a walk along Brompton Road may lead you to Harrod's, a department store irresistible alike to man and woman. Of Harrod's we need remark only that it is equipped with futuristic computerlike devices: you press a button and out come typewritten directions for the route to any department you may choose to visit, e.g. "BOOKS—Face the machine & turn left into the Linen Hall, then turn right—the Book Department now faces you." One of the direction machines is trilingual and on demand will print out "Bücher: Blickrichtung zur Maschine, dann Links . . ." or "Livres: Faites face à la machine et tournez à gauche. . ."

Going southward from Harrod's you traverse Chelsea and reach the Thames. Turn right, walk along the Chelsea Embankment, and presently you are passing a walled enclosure, whose pylons read "The Botanic Garden of the Society of Apothecaries of London, A. D. 1673" and "Granted to the Society in Perpetuity by Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. A. D. 1723."

It is advantageous to visit this site—now called the Chelsea Physic Garden—under the guidance of its hospitable curator, Mr. W. G. MacKenzie, a medalist of the Royal Horticultural Society. An area slightly larger than three and a half acres now supports a hundred natural families of plants in the open and an additional collection in greenhouses. Early medicinal plants and contemporary pharmaceutical plants are



Fig. 1. Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753). Statue by Rysbrack in Chelsea Physic Garden, London.



Fig. 2. The Chelsea Physic Garden.

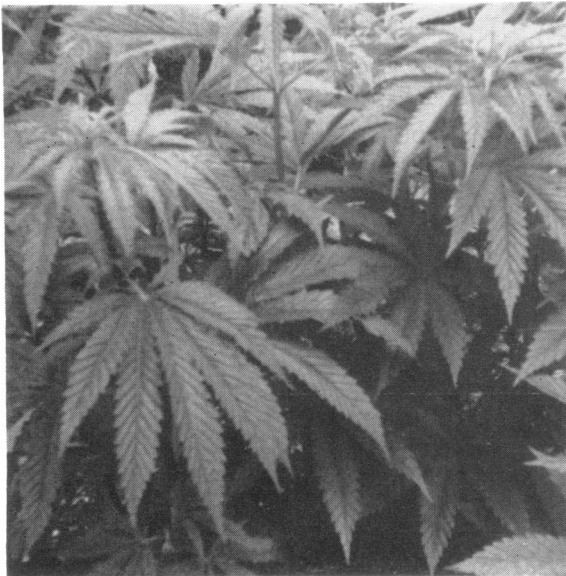


Fig. 3. *Cannabis indica*, Chelsea Physic Garden.

included, as are numerous ornamental, exotic, esculent, and incidental forms (see Figures 2 and 3). The indoor collection is used chiefly for teaching. At the end of the 19th century botany replaced pharmacy and pharmacognosy as the subject of principal emphasis. At present the garden supplies about 30,000 specimens a year to universities and other educational institutions. Research is carried on actively and this includes advanced genetic investigation and the use of radioactive isotopes.

The Garden still possesses its original library. Here one can see Gerarde's *Herball* in the desirable second edition (1633); Sir Hans Sloane's *Voyage to Jamaica* (1707); Sloane's copy of the *De historia stirpium* by Leonhart Fuchs (Basel, 1542); and a student prize awarded to James Paget at St. Bart's—the *Plantae Aequinoctiales* of Humboldt and Bonpland (1808).

The library and the Garden bear the imprint of three centuries. In 1673 the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London obtained the land by lease. Before long the functioning garden was used for the instruction of medical students, including the young Hans Sloane. In 1712 Sloane, now a distinguished and wealthy physician, purchased the manor of Chelsea and thus became ground-owner of the Garden. A decade later he deeded it to the Society of Apothecaries. His services commemorated by a statue (Figure 1) which stands in the Garden.

During the course of three centuries the Garden has established a notable place in botanical history. Here Linnaeus visited and collected specimens. Here Sir Joseph Banks sent plants acquired during his famous voyages. Here William Forsyth worked, for whom the forsythia is named. And from this garden seeds of the cotton plant were sent across the Atlantic to the impecunious North American colony of Georgia—of which Sir Hans Sloane was a promoter—as an innovation that might prove economically beneficial.

Like the old-fashioned anatomical theater, the pharmaceutical garden is an educational device that served an important purpose during earlier phases of medical education. It has yielded its primacy but it is not forgotten. Times have changed and we have changed with them.

S. J.

NOTES

I thank Mr. W. G. MacKenzie, curator, and Doctors Noel Poynter and W.S.C. Copeman, who helped me make arrangements for a visit

to the Garden. The photographs were taken by Thomas Jarcho.

The following works will be helpful to those who seek additional information:

- E. A. Underwood, editor: *A History of the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London*, vol. 1, 1617-1815, by C. Wall and H. C. Cameron. Publications of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum, new series, no. 8. London, Oxford University Press, 1963.
- W. S. C. Copeman: *The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London; A History, 1617-1967*. Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1967.
- C. R. B. Barrett: *The History of the Society of Apothecaries of London*. London, Stock, 1905.
- W. H. Godfrey: *The Parish of Chelsea (Part I)*. London, London County Council, 1909-1927.
- J. Strype: *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster . . . written at first in the year MDXCVIII by John Stow*, vol. 2, p. 233. London, Churchill, et al., 1720.
- T. Faulkner: *An Historical and Topographical Description of Chelsea*, 2 vols. in 1. Chelsea, Faulkner, 1829.